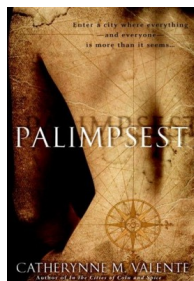




Lambda Sci-Fi

DC Area Gaylaxians



Palimpsest
By Catherynne Valente
Discussed February 2010

Dramatis Personae – Related to the Quarto

The Quarto	Their Pasts	Their Lovers	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> November Aguilar Ludovico Conti Amaya Sei Oleg Sadakov 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Lucia Conti (and Paola) Amaya Usagi Lyudmila Sadakov 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Xiaohui Xiaohui's brother Clara Nerezza Anoud Agostino 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Sato Kenji Yumiko Lyudmila Gabriel Hester

Dramatis Personae – Related to Palimpsest

Inhabitants/Avatars of Palimpsest		Figures From Myth and History
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Orlande Casimira Leonide Aloysius Imogen & Philomena Rosalie & Scamander 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Nhean Ermenegilde Oduvaldo General Ululiro The Third Rail The Pecia Casimira's house 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Chanthou (Who Loved No One) Mealea (Who Fell in the River) Lydia Weckweet Hortense Francis Weckweet

Discussion Questions

1. Did you like the book? Why or why not? What do you think of Valente's writing style?
2. Which of the four main characters' chapters did you find most engaging? Which did you connect with the least?

3. Valente uses different tenses and fonts to distinguish between sections set in the "real" world and sections set in Palimpsest. Did you find these shifts helpful or distracting?
4. Palimpsest receives the bulk of descriptive attention, while the "real" world streets and cafes are often nameless and generic. Oleg even hypothesizes that his city, New York, is a fiction. Why do you think Valente chose this approach?
5. Did you enjoy the digressions on Palimpsest's history, geography, and culture? Which story or location was your favorite?
6. Clara tells November a story (pp. 217-219) about the origin of Palimpsest. The story is supported by the photograph in the Palimpsest maritime museum and referenced by the names of Nhean's ladders. Do you believe the story is meant to be taken as "true"? Did it add or detract from your enjoyment of the book to have the magic grounded in reality?
7. Valente shows us two real-world factions, one committed to limiting access to Palimpsest and one committed to spreading it. Did you have stronger sympathies for one side or the other? What about the two sides in Palimpsest's civil war?
8. The nature of Palimpsest means the book has perhaps more than the usual number of sex scenes. How did they make you feel? Most of the characters are shown as willing to sleep with multiple genders; would you consider them bi?
9. On her first visit to the Floor of Heaven, Sei tries to dance and is told by Yumiko that "it's a waste of time. We've cut it all down the barest necessary interactions. It's better that way" (p. 105). She never tries again. Other members of the Quarto similarly reject the real world and interpersonal connections as the book progresses; November turns her rings inward, Oleg stops eating. Did you sympathize with their obsessive pursuit of Palimpsest?
10. What do you believe is Palimpsest's greatest draw to the characters? Are different characters drawn to it for different reasons?
11. Hester is the only character who turns away from Palimpsest, although others have experiences that are arguably equally as dark as hers. Why do you think she makes this choice?
12. Ludo paraphrases the Etymologiae as saying "that a creature can be virtuous just because it is loved and sought after, that the act of being loved . . . can confer grace" (p. 250) Do you believe Valente intends the city of Palimpsest and its avatars (the Pecia, the Third Rail, etc.) to be read as virtuous and/or "good"? Do you agree?
13. Did you find the resolution of Oleg and Ludo's confrontation with General Ululiro satisfying?
14. Do you feel the book's ending is a happy one?
15. In interviews, Valente has said "It's always infuriated me that in portal fantasy the characters' main priority is to get home immediately, and whine about it all the way there. Well, Kansas isn't so great, really, and if I am honest with myself, I wouldn't care at all for getting home in such a situation." and "It's a fantasy world that doesn't say: you have to be white and straight and virtuous and preferably male to live here." Do you think *Palimpsest* is successful in portraying a broader, more inviting fantasy world? Would you be tempted to emigrate if offered the choice?
16. Did you read any of the on-line material associated with *Palimpsest*, including the in-character blogs written for the pre-launch alternate reality game and *The Girl Who Circumnavigated Fairyland in a Ship of Her Own Making*? Have you read the original "Palimpsest" short story (<http://www.sensesfive.com/2008/04/01/palimpsest-by-catherynne-m-valente/>)? How did they affect your understanding and enjoyment of the book?